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DE RUEHEG #0084/01 0180532
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4737
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC

UNCLAS CAIRO 000084

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/RA, NEA/ELA, OES/STC (WILLIAM LAWRENCE)
WHITE HOUSE FOR OSTP (JASON RAO)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SCIENCE ENVOY ZEWAIL CONCLUDES SUCCESSFUL FIRST VISIT TO
CAIRO

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

1.(SBU) Key Points:

--In his inaugural trip to Egypt as U.S. Science Envoy, Dr. Ahmed Zewail met with senior government officials, business leaders, and the academic community to discuss ways in which the U.S. can collaborate with Egypt to bolster science and technology cooperation.

-- At a January 10 meeting of the Supreme Council for Science and Technology (SCST), Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif pledged to create a task force to identify key national science and technology challenges and determine how Egypt can contribute to future partnerships.

--Public diplomacy events with the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (AMCHAM) and a 10 year old child prodigy dubbed "the next Zewail" focused on the need to improve the education system to strengthen Egypt's position in the global scientific community.

-- Zewail will return to Egypt on January 24 to reassume his envoy role in a follow-up meeting with PM Nazif about the future direction of the task force and a speech to a student audience at the Cairo Opera House.

12. (U) Dr. Ahmed Zewail, one of three U.S. Science Envoys announced by Secretary Clinton in November 2009 visited Cairo from January 10-12 and met with Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, the Supreme Council for Science and Technology (SCST), and Minister of Defense Mohamed Tantawi to determine how the U.S. can support Egypt in implementing science and technology initiatives.

EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT PLEDGES SUPPORT

13. (SBU) In a January 10 meeting, Zewail briefed PM Nazif about the purpose of President Obama's envoy program, highlighting the desire to identify opportunities for new partnerships in science and technology - including math, engineering, health, energy, climate change research, and green technologies. Nazif welcomed Zewail's appointment and noted that science and technology programs can serve as important diplomacy and development tools to engage Muslim-majority countries, such as Egypt and across the Middle East region. Nazif also urged Zewail to act quickly in determining the best methods to "move ahead" and expressed a desire to have demonstrable results as soon as possible. "We don't want to wait for another June," Nazif explained, referencing President Obama's Cairo University speech in June 2009.

14. (SBU) Zewail also met with members of the SCST to listen to their concerns about challenges facing the country's education, science, and technology infrastructure. The council, a PM-chaired advisory

body that meets quarterly to establish national science and technology priorities, was specially convened for Zewail's visit and hosted eight ministers (Higher Education and Scientific Research; Telecommunication; Electricity; International Cooperation; Economic Development; Agriculture; Irrigation; and Military Production) as well as prominent individuals from the academic and business communities.

Different ministers noted the many problems facing Egypt: an increasing population, a struggling education system, and the lack of a skilled workforce. The council warmly received Zewail's proposal to work together on new initiatives focusing on education, science, and technology. He also discussed the concept of centers of excellence and encouraged the council to pursue this idea. Concluding the meeting, Nazif promised to form an inter-ministerial task force to investigate key science and technology priorities as well as study how Egypt can contribute to joint projects. He also invited Zewail to return to provide support to the task force.

15. (SBU) During a January 11 meeting with Minister of Defense Mohamed Tantawi, Zewail noted the important role U.S. military research plays in providing technology and knowledge for civilian use. Zewail thanked Tantawi for his leadership and asked him to participate in the SCST's task force to identify areas for potential cooperation. Tantawi, a member of the council, agreed and stated that he would do so to the long-existing and successful relationship between the American and Egyptian militaries.

Reaching out to the Business Community and Beyond

16. (U) At a January 12 breakfast hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (AMCHAM) and attended by more than 550 people,

Zewail spoke about the role the private sector can play in both leading and supporting science and technology partnerships between Egypt and the U.S. He explained that the core issue facing Egypt is the improvement of the country's public education system - especially at the primary and secondary level. Zewail emphasized the importance of creating an environment that rewards risk taking and academic innovation; he noted that his home university, the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech), had provided him with exactly these conditions and credited Cal Tech as a "major reason" for his accomplishments. Egypt did not necessarily need new buildings and organizations to achieve scientific and intellectual success, Zewail stated. More important was creating the right intellectual atmosphere, coupled with a significant increase in the country's pool of scientists and engineers, to improve the overall science and technology capacity. This would also lead to the development of greater innovation and entrepreneurial skills among university graduates.

17. (U) Zewail also met with a 10 year old American University of Cairo student, featured in a local publication the week before the visit and dubbed "the next Zewail." Zewail paid tribute to the boy's industriousness and determination to become a Nobel Prize winner and credited his parents in keeping him focused on academic pursuits. He explained that while Egypt welcomes foreign support, it is critical that Egyptians themselves determine how to solve the country's problems, chief among them the education system.

Zewail's Return to Egypt

18. (SBU) Following visits to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, Zewail will return to Egypt on January 24 for a series of events to build upon his inaugural envoy trip to Egypt. He will again meet with PM Nazif to learn what steps the task force has taken in determining science and technology alliances with the U.S. Zewail is also scheduled to address a student audience in a February 14th speech at the Cairo Opera House. During his first envoy trip, Zewail's personal popularity was evident in the extensive press coverage and high-level attendance at all of his events. Post looks forward to welcoming him back to Cairo and further engaging Egyptian counterparts in conversations about future collaborative projects.